
Visitor Services Project
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Summer and Fall Report Summary

- This report describes the results of two visitor studies at Great Smoky Mountains National Park during July 7-13, 1996 and October 15-21, 1996. Total questionnaires distributed: 1191 in summer; 1158 in fall. Questionnaires returned: 919 in summer, 945 in fall. Response rate: 77% in summer; 82% in fall.
- This report profiles Great Smoky Mountains summer and fall visitors. Separate appendices have visitors' comments about their visit; this report and the appendices contain a comment summary.
- Family groups comprised 77% of summer visitors and 70% of fall visitors. Thirty-six percent of Great Smoky Mountains summer visitors were in groups of two, as were 55% of fall visitors. During both seasons, 1% were in guided tour groups; less than one percent were in school groups. Of summer visitors, 39% were aged 31-50 years and 27% were aged 15 years or younger. In contrast, 45% of fall visitors were aged 46-65 years and 8% were ages 15 or younger.
- Among Great Smoky Mountains visitors, 2% were international visitors during both seasons. About one-fourth (23% in summer and 26% in fall) were from England, as well as several other countries. United States visitors during both seasons were from Tennessee (17%) and many other states.
- In the past year, many summer visitors (62%) had visited once, compared to 56% of fall visitors. When asked how often they had visited during the past five years, 65% were repeat visitors in summer compared to 79% of fall visitors. Over half of the visitors in both seasons (54% in summer; 62% in fall) said the park was their primary destination. Over three-fourths of the visitors (77% in summer; 82% in fall) said visiting Great Smoky Mountains NP was one of the reasons they came to the area.
- About two-thirds of the visitors (66% in summer; 62% in fall) spent less than one day in the park. During both seasons, the most popular activities at Great Smoky Mountains were viewing scenery, viewing wildlife/wildflowers, photography and visiting historic sites.
- Many visitors (71% in summer; 73% in fall) entered the park more than once during this trip. Some visitors (14% in summer; 11% in fall) used more than one vehicle to travel into the park. The Gatlinburg entrance was the most used entrance into and exit from the park during both seasons. Cades Cove Loop Road was the most visited place in the park (54% in summer; 61% in fall).
- The most used information services by 669 summer groups and 663 fall groups were the park brochure/map, visitor center information desk, and park newspaper. According to visitors, the most important and best quality services were ranger-led walks/talks in summer and the Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail in fall.
- The most used facilities by 778 summer groups and 799 fall groups were the restrooms, highway directional signs, and trails. According to summer and fall visitors, the most important facilities were campgrounds. The best quality facilities were the telephones in summer and the concession horseback ride in fall.
- For total expenditures, the average visitor group spent \$564 in the summer and \$561 in the fall. The average summer per capita expenditure was \$168 compared to \$202 for fall. The summer median visitor group expenditure (50% of groups spent more; 50% spent less) was \$440 compared to \$425 for fall visitor groups.
- Most visitors (90% in summer; 91% in fall) rated the overall quality of services in the park as "good" or "very good." Visitors made many additional comments.

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the University of Idaho Cooperative Park Studies Unit; phone (208) 885-7129 or 885-7863
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